Interview with Howard Frank Needham

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HOWARD FRANK NEEDHAM

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Q: Howard, I'm going to ask you to give us a brief background on where you came from, what your education was. If you had any professional or business activity before you went into the USIA program I'd like you to cover that, and then give me a brief description of the manner in which you got into the agency in the first place. From then we'll go on assignment by assignment, picking up your experiences, and your activities, and so forth. So will you start right now, unless you have a question before we start?

Biosketch - Pre-Government Career(s)

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, this might ramble a bit. Looking back, it seems to me that I was pointed to something like a lifetime of work in the communications field right from the beginning. But fate, in the form of the Depression, came along just as I was ready to enter college, and I was quickly faced with the need to decide on not going to college, and what kind of work I would get into, which would give me an academic platform for perhaps getting back to college later.

That led me to choose journalism, and I quite deliberately managed to obtain a foothold on the business side of the San Francisco Chronicle, which I retained until I was able to transfer to the editorial staff, and eventually began to climb the ladder there.

I was there for ten years.

Q: For which years?

NEEDHAM: Years 1932 to 1942, when I enlisted in the Army. But those ten years were rather rich in experience. I started my editorial career as radio editor for the paper, and went from that to general assignment. And then spent a year in heavy research, and came out of that as an assistant editor to the section called “This World,” which was just starting up in those days; that was about 1936 or '37.

Subsequent experience included legislative coverage, police court work, and a long, long stint as a rewrite man, which probably was what I was doing at the time the war broke out.

I thought things over for several months and finally decided that yes, it would be right to enlist. In September of '42, I enlisted in the Army of the United States. I was in the Army for three and a half years. When I came out, I took a job in New York City as Public Relations Director for RCA Communications, the original Marconi organization, taken over at that time by RCA.

This combination of occupations whetted my appetite for work in the communications field abroad. It didn't seem possible at the time that it could happen. I had married and my wife was having children. The possibilities seemed to dim when I chose not to raise the children on the east coast, but to return home to the west coast, where I felt the children would have a happier rearing.

Having done that, I rejoined journalism, this time going to work for the San Francisco Examiner, and two years later was stricken with endocarditis, which laid me low for about

a year. At the end of that year, the doctors suggested that I not go back into journalism, at least for the time being.

So I sought employment in a quieter atmosphere, and began taking civil service examinations, largely for the mental exercise and with the idea that sometime in the not-distant future I would, perhaps, secure employment with the government. This led to employment with the Oakland Naval Supply Center as an industrial relations specialist for the Center, which included publication of a weekly employee organ.

This position at the supply center commenced in 1950. The Korean War broke out in 1951, and in the same year President Truman called for the International Campaign of Truth, which was a nation-wide call for information and media specialists. It seemed to me at that time that there might be an opportunity to utilize my civil service eligibility and my journalistic background in a program which would have a great many installations abroad. So when Anthony Covins came to San Francisco, along with Ambassador Durbrow, and set up a State Department recruiting operation at the Clift Hotel, I trotted down there and submitted my application and a brief resume. To my delight I was accepted as an eligible candidate for the new program. And that marked my entrance to what later became USIA.

1951: Entrance into USIA Predecessor Organization; Assignment to Madras, India

Q: This was 1951?

NEEDHAM: Yes. I received my letter of appointment from the Department of State in April of 1951, and reported within a few weeks to the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, D.C., for preliminary training. Subsequently, I was assigned to Madras, India—in South India—as an assistant information officer and vice consul, and at a very low grade I might add, which was later corrected.

Q: So you were assigned to Madras in Southern India; that was a fractious time in India, as I recall. I'd like to ask you what was your impression at the time; what experiences did you have as you got there that were important to give you the atmosphere of the place?

NEEDHAM: Well, atmosphere was certainly strong, Lew. To this day I have a vivid, almost immediate recollection of every detail of my arrival at Sahar Airport, just outside Bombay. The ride into town was really jolting to an American brought up with very little overseas experience. I had never seen poverty or squalor to the degree that I saw it along the roadside from Sahar Airport into Bombay. That was very jolting and gave me second thoughts as to where I was bringing the family, which by that time consisted of a wife and three children.

I arrived at the hotel, the famous Taj Mahal Hotel, commonly known as the Taj, on a bright, sunny afternoon after a very long flight. In those days we had no jets. It was a motor flight, with the only stop at Cairo, all the way from London, and I was exhausted. I remember sitting on the bed and bending over to take off my shoes, and that's the last thing I recall until about 8:00 the following morning when I awakened. There was a bearer in my room and he was drawing a bath, and unpacking my suitcase.

Oddly enough, I awakened with the same question in the forefront of my mind with which I had drifted off to sleep. That was, “Where am I bringing my family?”

I stepped to the French-doors window, opening onto a balcony, and looked down into the beautiful garden below, and watched some of the gardeners at work. It was a bright, sparkling, sunny day, and I was struck with the vivid foliage and colors of India, in a most picturesque—almost Hollywood-type setting. And something about this reassured me, and as I stood on the balcony and listened to the chatter in Gujarati language—at that time, I understood not a word of it—I realized that these were a very poor people, and a very cheerful people. I was somewhat reassured. I felt that perhaps it was going to be a very good experience for all of us. I never had reason, in the subsequent four years that

I served in India, to reverse that feeling. It is something that I find a little amazing, even today, to realize.

I look upon the Hindu people, and the people of that subcontinent, as a very happy and courageous people, in spite of their hardships. I find it humbling to compare their lot with our lot, or even with the lot of Western civilization. I doubt that there would be the same amount of cheerful acceptance of hardship anywhere west of the Suez.

I perhaps should mention that en route to Madras I went from Bombay by air to New Delhi for consultation with Clare Timberlake, at that time Country Public Affairs Officer for all of India. He later became ambassador, and is best known for his career in the Belgian Congo—what is now known as Zaire.

After several days' consultation in Delhi, I proceeded on to Madras, where I took up my duties as assistant information officer, and publications officer.

The first problem that we seemed to have was getting a small pamphlet printed, which had been in the printing shop for several months. When I inquired as to why it had not come off the presses, the reply was that they were lacking a certain drying agent for their inks, and had to send to Europe for it—a chemical. They stated it was impossible to print without this drying agent in the dye, for the colored cover of the proposed pamphlet.

I took this up with the foreman of the plant, an ex-RAF officer who had elected to stay on in India—a very charming fellow. We had a long lunch, during which he said there was one thing they might try, and it struck me as very odd; they could substitute the white of an egg for this chemical and perhaps that would react under the heat of their gas jets as a drying agent. At least it would be worth trying, and we'd get a dye fix for the deep blue color, which was part of the cover. And this worked. I had never heard of it before, nor since. I think it's probably the first time and the only time that a USIA pamphlet was printed with the help of the white of an egg.

Getting the Newly Established Branch Post at Madras Under Way

Q: I think when we had the tape off, you said something about this being a new post. Was it? Were you just opening the post at that time?

NEEDHAM: Yes, it was midsummer of 1951. Construction of USIS Madras had just been completed, with a substantial public (USIS) library as a nearby annex. Media and cultural affairs offices were housed in a large and airy building in Mount Road. We had the five languages of Madras State in which to work. They are actually distinct languages, having their own writing systems. I emphasize they were not dialects or sub-dialects. Each language had to have its own translation staff. We hired translator editors; people with some journalistic experience, but who were at least bilingual in two Hindu languages.

This was the staffing pattern with regard to the publications and press programs. We had the wireless file coming in at that time, and it was circulating in a limited version to about thirty publications in the countryside, and to five large daily publications (in three different languages), in Madras and its environs, on a daily basis. So the need for the translating desks to get fully operating was immediate and a matter of pressure.

In addition to not having all the furniture in place, we had not completed our hiring program. At the same time we were endeavoring to get into pay-dirt operation. The pamphlet came off the press and the advice had been good. The cover was fine, the colors were fixed, and it, I think, was the first pamphlet published from the new headquarters.

Publishing Thirteen Book Titles in Five Indian Languages

The next job of size or moment was a quick call from Delhi in late June, asking if we could arrange to publish thirteen American book titles—American literature, classics for the most part, in each of the five South Indian languages. I remember that the book I was most

interested in was George Orwell's 1984, which I thought would be an excellent think piece for all five language-audiences.

About George Orwell—of course, we know he was a British officer, and we know that his work was highly political. My reason for including Orwell's work among the list of other titles, most of them less political, was that I felt that the Orwell thesis was a very strong counter to the rather frightening inroads into popular opinion local Communist Parties were making throughout India at this time of great change; and at this time when the Indians were coming out of centuries of not having any popular government of their own, most of them never having been concerned with government. Some of them didn't know what “government” was.

Ferment and public confusion contributed to what might have been a very fertile ground for communist takeover at that time. We did not feel that such likelihood was imminent, but neither could we ignore it.

We finally got the books translated, edited, printed, bound and published, and the next step was to get them distributed to where there were people who were literate, and with a few rupees to purchase them. They were sold at a very low price. They were paperbacks. They were printed, published, bound, and translated at very low cost. That was a phenomenon of operating in the communications field in India in those days.

Distribution was accomplished largely through the little book stalls, which you would see in every railroad station of South India. And it was a happy circumstance that these kiosks existed. We had the cooperation of the new Madras state government in gaining a franchise to distribute these books through the state-operated railway system.

We then proceeded to go to more conventional targets, and began to build our mailing lists of literate purchasers in all five languages who were asked to fill out a card giving basic biographical data, which became part of a language-circulation file. Most of them were pleased to sign on to a new learning source. We scrounged directories and libraries for

lists of doctors, lawyers, educators. We visited colleges and high schools, where bright students were completing their education. And we encouraged the general public to come in and see the library and make a visit to the Mount Road office. At that time, we had gifts of pamphlets and other literature to hand out to visitors.

Q: You already answered part of my question. I assume you were aiming these books at, primarily, the elite of India, the educated of India, and those who had a reasonable reading capability. And I gather that you probably thought that the mass of Indians, who were clear down at the poverty level, weren't going to be very influential in the Indian political scene. Is that a correct assumption?

Film and Poster Programs for the Illiterate or Semi-literate

NEEDHAM: In part it is, Lew. We did feel that the mass was unfortunately illiterate. But you can't live in India very long without realizing that the most illiterate group in any language is alert; they're attentive, they are receptive, and the job of getting a response from them is really facilitated by their keen interest in the world about them, in spite of the poverty conditions which are overwhelming.

We had other means of approaching these people, both the literate and the illiterate. There was the motion picture program, the mobile units which went out to the villages and presented USIS films, all of which had some spoken message of encouragement and often a message of how to improve things in general. Many of these films were acquired from American sources, and soundtracks dubbed in, in the native languages.

I feel that also our exhibits program, perhaps, was even more effective, especially in urban areas, where we could put on a large exhibit, and where there was avid interest in anything foreign, especially in anything American, in those days. The hunger appeared to be inexhaustible, whether it be for books, exhibits, films, or visits to the office. We often were crowded with people in our reading room.

Q: I don't remember whether you mentioned earlier, but you did mention, first of all, Orwell's 1984—the British author. I gather most of your books, however, were of American origin. About how many titles did you put out? What were some of the other books that you published? Do you have any fix on the number of volumes that were sold, or distributed?

NEEDHAM: It's difficult to recall right now what the print runs were on these 14 titles, and subsequent titles which were published. It's even difficult to remember all the titles. But we were not printing heavy tomes, or massive works, such as you would expect from early American literature. We were putting out contemporary literary works.

When I say contemporary, I go back as far as the early 20th century, and maybe even a few in the late 19th century. It seems to me we put out three of Mark Twain's works, in an effort to provide something interesting for the youth audiences, the literate youth audiences. Other works were abridged so that the end product could be something handily carried by the dhoti-clad passengers along the South India railway system. And I also might mention that our best customers, of course, were from the first class and second class carriages. Pamphlets were also available on the railroad platforms for third class passengers, some of whom had sufficient reading ability to be interested in obtaining them.

Tamil was our richest language. It seems to me that we published, and sold successfully somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 of these various 14 titles, to the Tamil audience alone. The other language audiences took proportionately less, but I would say that in all we probably sold between 80,000 and 100,000 books that year. I emphasize that this is many years ago, and I have not kept notes. But this estimate feels right to me at this time.

Q: You've been talking about editing and publishing these books in the five different languages that were prevalent in Madras State. I don't think you've named them yet, except incidentally. Can you tell me what those five languages were?

NEEDHAM: Well, I can recall, of course, Tamil, which is the main language of South India. And its running mate, Telugu. Then Malayalam, which is the language spoken over on the west coast.

Q: Would you spell that for the transcriber?

NEEDHAM: As I recall, it was M-A-L-A-Y-A-L-A-M. I wouldn't say that I'm a Webster authority on how you spell Malayalam; the fourth language was Kannada.

Q: You'd better spell that, too.

NEEDHAM: That would probably be K-A-N-N-A-D-A. The fifth language was Hindi.

Q: I don't know whether you want to say anything more about the book program right now, but you mentioned, also, that you were using the wireless file extensively, and therefore I assume you had to have contact with the editors of the press. So you might tell me just exactly how you operated there, and what sort of material, besides the wireless file if any, you got into the press. And finally, was this government press or was this an independent, private press operation?

NEEDHAM: To answer your last question first, Lew, as far as the press was concerned, it was, for the most part, private enterprise, in all languages. Even though we were in the highly urban area of Madras City, there were a great many small, lingual newspapers, some of them weeklies, and some of them bi-weeklies. In addition to that, there was one English language daily, The Daily Mail, and another daily, which was owned by Goenka. Goenka was the William Randolph Hearst of the subcontinent.

Q: Could you spell his name, as well as you can recall it?

NEEDHAM: Yes, that would have been G-O-E-N-K-A, and I'm sorry, I don't remember Goenka's first name, because he was a charming fellow, and a generous host. He

delighted in having Americans to his house for dinner about once a month. And the occasions were always enlightening as well as enjoyable.

We contacted editors of the language press, as we called it, largely through our local employees. This was because they were familiar with their own translations. They, for the most part, had previously worked at one or more of these publications, and were on close professional terms, and in some cases, close personal terms with the editors. And we felt that their entr#e and their welcome would bear the weight of daily, or semi-daily contact with these local staffs better than the U.S. consular presence inflicting itself too frequently.

We saved ourselves for visits on occasions such as anniversaries, promotions, the presentation of a new project, or similar occasions, and left the day-to-day press contact to our local employees, who did an excellent job, and placed a great amount of material. I might emphasize here that the press reflected the intellectual hunger of India in general in those days. They were so excited at being a free country, they were so hopeful of overcoming their illiteracy, hope sprang eternal. And it was a time of joyful anticipation, really. The press of India, particularly South India, reflected that mood at that time, which operated to a great extent in our favor; it made our materials welcome.

Q: What kind of materials were you getting into the press? I presume you got in much from the wireless file, but did you get any other kind of material—of an editorial character, or so forth—into the press?

NEEDHAM: Yes. Considering that Madras State was composed of five former political entities, either provinces or city-states, and 80,000,000 people speaking five different languages, it was a rich, sort of garden variety of a placid, methodical people, who for the most part got along very well together. And we were able, always, to place current news in the daily press, without any difficulty whatsoever; it was welcomed.

The Sunday editors were open to us for long-length features. Their primary interest was “what is America like? Is it truly the fairyland that we've heard?” And we were balancing

our act to explain to them that, comparatively speaking, it was a fairyland, but that it was founded on hard work, and without identifying the puritan principle or work ethic as such, we described it.

Also, their interest ran to things cultural. They were fascinated with our motion picture industry. And incidentally, they had a very strong motion picture industry of their own in South India, Gemini Studios, run by a charming and able person, named Vasan. Vasan saved USIS Madras from a great deal of embarrassment during an international film festival, at which the Communists had arranged an elaborate exhibition—a five-day exhibition—on the beach, on the Bay of Bengal Beach, (of Madras City), whilst the Americans apparently had overlooked the fact that this event was coming to Madras. But I'll get to that later.

Q: We just started your discussion on the film industry when we stopped for a moment, and I think I may not have asked you before, but I guess you did not produce films in India at that time, that is, USIS did not. Were you getting all of your films, or nearly all of them, through the Agency or from the States? And what did you do about linguistics? Did you dub them, then, in India?

NEEDHAM: We in Madras depended largely on USIS New Delhi for guidance and materials with regard to the motion picture program. The pictures that we were showing were acquired by USIS headquarters in New Delhi, and were farmed out to the branch offices in the consular districts.

At first we were working with whatever we could get, frankly. And whatever we could get often was something out of Hollywood; something out of the documentary studios that dot Hollywood, on various subjects; films that were not exactly box-office appeal, but had some remote, or closer, relationship to the problems that India was facing at that time. I'm thinking primarily of films that dealt with education, with child care, with prenatal care; the

forerunners of the great amount of how-to-do-it, how to live, how to improve conditions films that were produced later for USIS audiences.

From there, of course, it has developed now to the point where the film output by USIA is a sophisticated product. Also, the audience in India is a different audience from the audience that I am talking about, which after all, we must remember was back in the 1950s.

Q: You did say earlier, I think, that you went out with the mobile unit program—went out into the hinterland. Where were you going? What kind of audiences were you reaching with this mobile unit program? And about how many mobile units were you operating?

NEEDHAM: It seems to me we were operating between 14 and 20 mobile units at almost any time in Madras. We had the capability of putting 20 on the road, but I would say that out there four or five were generally on down-time, and our active fleet was probably 15 most of the time.

As to where they went, they went to small villages in the hinterlands. South India is dotted with small villages; it's impossible to count all of them. But one cannot travel two or three miles without coming across at least two or three villages. They are so close as to be within eyesight of each other, separated largely by the dikes, paddies of rice, farms and occasional desert areas.

We felt that the motion picture program, and the exhibits program really filled a gap when it came to contacting an illiterate audience. Here was the spoken word. Here were pictures that they could stand in front of and study. And they did.

It was an enjoyable thing to watch an Indian crowd amble through an exhibit. It was the slowest moving crowd you ever saw, and gradually queues would build up behind a given shot, or a given item in an exhibit, while they stood transfixed with it. And one or more members of the audience, who were literate and could read—that was usually the

proportion of literate to illiterate—would kindly step forth and read the native-language caption, which we had placed alongside of the item.

It was a rudimentary time, and a most enjoyable time, because we were welcomed at that time.

Q: Who was dubbing your films in the different languages?

NEEDHAM: They were done in Delhi, at a large studio in New Delhi. I cannot remember the name of the motion picture officer at that time, but he was excellent; he kept a steady stream of titles coming to us.

Q: I think you mentioned earlier, when you went to New Delhi initially for your orientation in India, that Clare Timberlake was the Country PAO. I had not been aware that Clare Timberlake ever had a USIA career, or a USIS career. This must have been just one assignment, or maybe one of two assignments that he had in the information program. Can you enlighten me on that?

NEEDHAM: Yes, Clare was, of course, a Foreign Service career officer with the State Department. And you're quite right, Lew, this was I think perhaps the single assignment, which he handled very capably, in India, with the information program.

As you may recall, in those days occasionally somebody in State would suddenly get the idea that perhaps this, (USIS), new outfit was doing something in which they ought to be interested. It might possibly round out some of the abilities of their officers. And in any case, Clare said to me, during our consultation, that he had taken the assignment because he felt it had a lot to offer anybody who planned to work in public affairs abroad, to get to know opinion molders; to understand the motivation behind professional communicators in various fields, he felt, was almost another department of diplomacy.

Q: Do you remember who the ambassador was at that time?

NEEDHAM: Yes, that was Ambassador Loy Henderson.

Q: Oh, Loy Henderson. I knew Henderson later; I never knew whether he really understood the information program or not, but if he had a man like Timberlake at that point, it didn't make much difference.

NEEDHAM: That's right. Ambassador Henderson left India very shortly after I arrived, and for years I was completely out of touch with his career.

An Interesting Anecdote

Q: When we had the tape off for a few minutes just now, you were mentioning an event that occurred at the time. It was a rather interesting anecdote, and I wish you'd pick up and talk about it now. And spell the name of the gentleman that was involved in it.

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, this is perhaps not an earth-shaking anecdote, but it has a certain Hindu charm for me, largely because the principal figure was a very charming, 85-year-old man, who had long been, under the British Raj, a father to the Indian people, and a great representative.

NEEDHAM: His name was Rajagopalachari; that was his last name, I never knew his first name. It seemed enough if I could master Rajagopalachari. Rajagopalachari was a man, cadaverous, six-feet tall perhaps, a Brahman, very distinguished in the Indian sense.

He had operated with Mahatma Gandhi as a pioneer organizer of the Congress Party of India. He knew the British Raj extremely well. As I said previously, was a marvelous representative; had been a bridge, if you like, between the Raj and his people. And he had the respect of the British and of his people. He had held many high offices in the government of India, under the British Raj, not least of all he had been a governor of Madras during the time of Raj.

In 1947 he had been tapped by the British, by Mountbatten and his group, out of retirement to become the pro tem governor of Madras State, in preparation for the first annual elections to be held under independence, which as you know, came to India in 1951.

The work of organizing this took place during the seventh year of a continuous drought, and particularly in South India things were very, very difficult for people. The water tanks were almost dry. Disease had broken out in the cities and the villages. The crops had been light, down to almost non-existence for the last three years.

And came the day in 1951, finally, when all delegates had been elected and Rajagopalachari, still pro tem governor, was convening the very first congress of the newly independent state government of Madras. And as he did so, the chamber filled up with a large, and noisy, and jubilant crowd, which was perhaps peppered by the frequent outbursts from the front benches, where the communist delegates were seated, waiting for governor Rajagopalachari to come on stage and commence the ceremonies, which he did. And he was greeted with great applause. He was a beloved figure, particularly in the south of India, but also in the north.

This was like a crowning of his life's work. He was, early on, a Mahatma Gandhi disciple. To a great many of the Indians these were the times and events of a fulfillment of all of the Mahatma's programs. So it was a momentous and emotional occasion, interrupted unfortunately, as the old gentleman proceeded with his introductory remarks, by the communist deputies down in front, who every time Rajagopalachari paused for breath, would leap to their feet, singly or collectively, and shout, “Mr. Speaker, may we know?”

And finally Rajagopalachari stopped in the middle of his address, lowered his spectacles on his rather long and aquiline nose, and like an ancient grandfather or professor peered over the stage-apron at the communist deputies and said, “Yes, may you know what?”

And the deputies said, “We have been starving for seven years. We are thirsty. Our tanks are dry. Our children and wives are getting sick. And we want to know what is the new government going to do about that?”

Rajagopalachari paused and raised his hands in the traditional Hindu gesture of the Namast# blessing, and said very solemnly, “We will pray for rain.” That stopped the raucous behavior of the communist deputies, and the proceedings went on to a happy conclusion and an orderly one. And we all started home at about 4:30 in the afternoon.

At approximately 5:00 a typhoon blew into Madras and dropped four inches of rain in about five hours. This “miraculous” episode, of course, was reported throughout the Indian press.

At this time we had a picture in the exhibits section of another event, in which Rajagopalachari was shown giving the Namast# sign of prayer-greeting and smiling at the camera. We enlarged this picture and put it in the lobby of the Mount Road office for some time. Needless to say, it drew many response-smiles from our visitors.

Outmaneuvering the Soviets When a Film Festival was Scheduled in Madras Without Advance Notification to USIS/Madras

Q: You were discussing earlier, when we were off tape, about an incident that occurred when a film festival was given unexpectedly—or unexpectedly to you, at least, in Madras. And I think that's worth putting on tape, so I'd like you to proceed with that now, will you Howard?

NEEDHAM: Yes, I'd be happy to. I'll start by apologizing, which is always a bad start, for not having all the details at my fingertips. But this was an exciting event and maybe just the raw substance of what really happened will suffice.

The film festival we are talking about took place in 1952 on Elliot's Beach, which is on the Madras (Western) side of the Bay of Bengal. It was attended by Western delegations

from Western film-making nations, as well as from several European and Asian nations. The largest and most elaborate pavilion was the Soviet pavilion. In those days the Soviets would put on a festival, not sparing any horses, and I mean not any. We, on the other hand, in our little office over on Mount Road, had been absolutely unaware of this event. How it happened that we were unaware of it, I cannot explain. But we were unaware of it until about a week before it was due to open up, when we first heard of it.

At that time our public affairs officer, Paul Sherbet, was very concerned. In his opinion, the festival had weight around the world, and particularly out in Southeast Asia. So was there any action we could take to counter this immense budget-spectacle which we had been reliably informed the Soviets were putting forth for the occasion?

And it seemed at first that there wasn't anything we could do except sit there and take a whipping. Paul began to plunge around in his own mind and recalled that he had a friendship with Hollywood's famous producer/director Frank Capra. And he thought of having Frank fly out as a guest so that we could at least, perhaps, capture the interest of India's film brass and whoever else the Indian film brass might wish to invite from other delegations. And in short, we might be able, through the aegis of Mr. Capra, to attract an audience of multinational film moguls from Asia and Europe who were there, attending the festival.

So this was set in motion and Delhi tried to reach State and have State contact Mr. Capra. At first, State took a dim view of the idea but later, under urging from Ambassador Timberlake—or I should say, at that time, Public Affairs Officer Timberlake—they revised their opinion and did put the request through to Frank Capra in Hollywood. He immediately recognized Paul's name and said yes, he'd be glad to come out. And as a result, he was there in three days.

Capra's presence in India was of marked impact to people like Sri Vasan, who was the president of Gemini Studios, (one of the largest movie studios in the world), and who for

years has achieved record box office revenues throughout Asia with his pictures. Vasan was delighted to have Frank Capra as his guest the whole time Capra was there. Vasan also volunteered something to us while we were waiting for Frank to arrive. It seemed that an independent film producer—Indian, a Tamil, another Brahman—named Sundaram, had an international cast, making what people call a French Western, down in Kerala State at that time. And among the cast was Cesar Romero, Rod Cameron, and a couple of other well-known American stars, whose names I do not recall at this distant juncture. Perhaps they, too, could come up to Madras and be honored guests?

So the result of all this was that we had Frank Capra and four American stars and numerous other Asian film lights, who were in the Sundaram Company, in the garden at PAO Sherbet's home in Madras. And the party went on variously—in Mr. Vasan's garden, the gardens of other film producers who lived and worked in Madras—for three days. We didn't exactly win the game, but we certainly did attract the brass from most of the delegations who had been spending all their time out on Elliot's Beach. We felt we had countered, from a defensive position, rather well.

Q: Well, it sounds to me as though even if it wasn't gathering all the crowds, it was at least a show of one-upmanship against the Soviets. Do you have anything else about the tour before we go on to your experience in Delhi?

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, there's much that I could tell but it all would boil down to what amounts to—in my mind, even to this day—as a love affair with the people of my first post. And I think this is typical of most Foreign Service people.

Q: I just want to ask one final question then. We spoke briefly about radio activities earlier. You said you did have a radio officer there? What kind of a program were you putting on?

NEEDHAM: We did not have an American radio officer there. It was handled by one of our senior locals and he worked off the wireless file. I would provide him with a copy of the wireless file early in the morning and he would go through and make his own picks as to

what the various radio stations would be interested in, and we would review his choices together. Normally I did not question his judgment. He was a graduate print journalist who had been a radio announcer for years. He was a man in his middle forties and mature and well known in the community.

Q: Was the radio controlled by the government at that time or was it free as the press was?

NEEDHAM: No, radio at that time was still under government control.

Q: So there was a certain limitation to what you could get on the radio then, because of that?

NEEDHAM: Exactly, yes. However, the limitation was seldom exercised.

June 1952: Transfer From Madras to Delhi as Managing Editor of USIS India's Nationwide Publication American Reporter

Q: Well, I guess we've covered Madras now. Before we ever started this you told me that you were later brought up to Delhi. Can you tell me when that occurred and what were the circumstances under which you were transferred to Delhi and what assignment you had there?

NEEDHAM: Well, I was transferred to Delhi in June of '52, largely as a result of our finally getting five language desks set up for the South Indian language editions of the American Reporter, which was a USIS weekly newspaper that was published in eight languages throughout India, with the parent publication, of course, being in English, and produced at USIS New Delhi. Madras was, I think, the first post to get its language editions in operation. And I was direct-transferred up to Delhi as managing editor of the American Reporter at that time.

Q: So this was then a nationwide publication, but it went out in various languages, from the basic English that was prepared in Delhi?

NEEDHAM: That's right. I was no longer involved in the language editions. The staff in Delhi was already established. It was a very competent group and also the source of many friendships during the following three years.

Q: Was Clare Timberlake still the PAO at that time? Or had he been replaced then?

NEEDHAM: He had been replaced by that time. He had been replaced by Teg Grondahl. By that time, also, Ambassador Chester Bowles was on post, succeeding Loy Henderson.

Q: I guess, from what you said, that after you were transferred to Delhi, you had no other duties but that regarding the editing and issuance of the American Reporter. So there really isn't a great deal more to say about your first tour.

Now, I understand you went on home leave and then came back to a different assignment. So just how did that work and when did you go on home leave?

August 1953: Home Leave, Threat of Being Cut in Worldwide Reeducation in Force

NEEDHAM: I went on home leave in the latter part of July or perhaps the early part of August in '53. In any case, George Venable Allen had arrived and was ambassador to India at that time.

Q: Didn't you also think that was about the time that you were getting the first notice of the big cut that the Eisenhower Administration ordered in the latter part of '53?

NEEDHAM: Yes. There was a very large cut and we reduced the audience size—our circulation expenses—on the American Reporter in order to conform to that portion of the cut which applied to the American Reporter.

Q: But the cut in personnel, which came subsequent to that, had not taken place at the time you went on home leave? That was occurring while you were on home leave.

NEEDHAM: That's correct.

Q: As I understand it, the notification of the cut in personnel occurred while you were on home leave. And at the time that you started on home leave, and most of the time you were there, you were not sure whether you, yourself, were going to be cut, or whether you were going to be retained and go back to Delhi. So will you pick it up at that point and tell me what happened on home leave and then your return to Delhi and your assignment and what you did thereafter?

NEEDHAM: Well, of course the first thing to do on home leave always was to park your family where convenient and get yourself into Washington for your debriefing, and the routine medical examination, which all officers take when they return to Washington.

That went rather smoothly. I was unable to determine whether or not I was going to be RIFed or fired. The corridors of Washington were ominously laden with conversations speculating about who was going to be fired and who was not going to be fired. It seemed to be a government-wide cut. My desk officer told me to go on home leave and to wait for a call from him, which I did. Had a most enjoyable home leave and a most enjoyable phone call at the end of it, when I was told to get back to India, that my berth there was secure and they were waiting to receive me.

So we re-embarked via Monarch Pan Am clipper, which was a propeller ship, and the five Needhams returned to India by way of Honolulu and Wake Island. We refueled there and went on into Tokyo. From Tokyo we flew to New Delhi via Bangkok. That was the Pacific route to India for Pan Am in those days.

Duty during the second tour involved a lot of routine information work. There were no particular highlights in terms of the post's relationship with its host government.

Late 1953: Return to Delhi as Information Officer for Delhi Consular District. Rather Uneventful Tour Except for Severe Bout With Hepatitis

Q: Specifically, what was your position at that time?

NEEDHAM: Specifically, I was Information Officer for the New Delhi Consular District. And it involved support of other sections in USIS at the time. We all managed to cross-fertilize our ideas as well as our materials in those days.

I haven't very much to recount. It seems to me unfortunate that the thing that stands out in my mind is a very severe bout with hepatitis, which I contracted while on special duty in Kandy, Ceylon. I'd been sent there to act as Information Officer for the American delegation to the 10th Plenary Session of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, which was being chaired by, at that time—at first, by Ambassador Crowe, who was then ambassador to Ceylon—but about the third or fourth day of the conference he was stricken with a mild heart attack, which proved to be not too serious, but which eliminated him from the running for the rest of the conference. And the chief delegate from Washington—I think it was Dr. Merrill Gay—took over as leader of the American delegation throughout the remainder of the three-week session.

During that period of time, some way or other, I managed to contract hepatitis and by the time I got back to New Delhi I was acutely ill, and rather dangerously so. I was examined by two doctors from the embassy clinic and they decided not to move me to Dhahran, which would have been the nearest hospital; that I would be better off taking my chances staying right in bed at home, which I did for three months and eleven days, then recovered slowly and returned to partial duty until, finally, it appeared that I was not going to make a

complete recovery while in the tropics. And so I went home rather early in the second tour. I would say it must have been a good ten months before the natural termination date.

Q: That was when? In 1954, then?

1955: Transfer to Washington Assigned to International Press Service (IPS)

NEEDHAM: That was early 1955. And I quickly picked up, health-wise, upon return to the United States and was assigned to the International Press Service, first as a feature writer, then as a cable editor, and finally, as special assistant to the chief of the International Press Service.

Q: Who was the chief then?

NEEDHAM: At that time it was Leland Briggs. Burnett Anderson was his deputy.

My second IPS assignment was to the cable desk, where Jack Caldwell and I set up the international teams for coverage of international events for the agency. We had teams in Geneva, in Strasbourg, in London, and we had stringers in Berlin and we had a correspondent based—I believe it was in Singapore. If it wasn't in Singapore it may have been in Bangkok—who covered Asia and the Far East for us.

That was a very interesting assignment because we dialogued via teleprinter on assignments and the results were rather fruitful for the wireless file. We were able to extract fresh, timely, on-the-ground coverage by experienced reporters and writers, giving a livelier note to the wireless file when it came to international news; not necessarily that affecting primarily the United States.

Q: How long were you in that assignment?

NEEDHAM: Approximately one year. Following my tour as a feature writer, and cable editor with Jack Caldwell, I was assigned to Leland Briggs' office, which later became Bill Hutchinson's office, as Director of IPS. I was special assistant to both directors.

Q: How long were you in that assignment, then, and until what date?

NEEDHAM: I was in the special assistant's role for approximately one year, maybe a little less. I left Washington for Guatemala in July, very early in July—perhaps July 1st or 2nd of 1957.

Mid 1957: Posted to Guatemala as Information Officer

Q: But in the meantime, you had some Spanish-language training, I gather?

NEEDHAM: [Laughter] Oh, yes.

Q: Briefly?

NEEDHAM: Yes. Well, that goes back to why I switched from Southeast Asian area to the Latin American area. As I reported previously, I had this terrible bout with hepatitis and had no desire to expose myself to tropical climates, food, and water for some time. I figured, at that time, that a change in area would be timely and that perhaps my best efforts could be put in Latin America where, being a Californian, I had inherited an interest from childhood. Having had four years of high school Spanish, perhaps I would be able to latch onto enough language at the Foreign Service Institute to be effective doing information work for the agency in Latin America.

Accordingly, I applied for transfer to the Latin American area and was told to get my Spanish in better shape before making formal application. I did this at my own expense, and thinking that I had at least the beginnings of, and the foundation for, an expanding

ability, I did apply formally and was invited to take an informal test in the office of the assistant director for Latin America, who at that time was Frank Oram.

He had a personnel officer in his area, Hal Urist by name, who was a charming fellow, but whose idea of testing was rather rigorous. He presented me with a volume of Cervantes' Spanish and suggested that I translate several pages. Well, of course, this was impossible for my meager ability at that time, and I failed that test. I then proceeded to do a little corridor work with friends and they came to me with the same advice, “Get more Spanish, but in the meantime we'll see what we can do about your application.”

I proceeded to study more Spanish and finally achieved a non-idiomatic ability, probably at level two, and did make formal application again and was accepted and finally was given orders to report to Guatemala as information officer.

Q: What was the date on this, now?

NEEDHAM: Well, the orders came through in middle-June and I was to report in the first week of July.

Q: Of 1957?

NEEDHAM: That was 1957.

Q: So you went to Guatemala, then, in July of '57 and took up the position of Information Officer?

NEEDHAM: That's right.

Q: Okay.

NEEDHAM: I arrived in Guatemala a month ahead of my family, about July 2nd, and I was greeted by Public Affairs Officer Fred Barcroft. My information assistant at that time was

Eugene Friedmann, who later became Minister Consular and deputy chief of mission in Santiago, Chile, and also served as deputy chief of mission in Pretoria, South Africa, in the '80s.

It was a very interesting and beautiful, little country. There was ample media with which to work. There were 11 daily newspapers in the capital city of Guatemala City. There were about 23 radio stations, independently owned except for one, throughout the country. And the Guatemalteco Americano, binational center was a mature and well-developed teaching base. It boasted an auditorium, library, and large enclosed patio for exhibits and gatherings of all sorts, located in the very heart of town and widely used by almost all the students at the university and in the various high schools about the city.

A Time of Some Turmoil in Guatemala: USIS Required to Remain Low Key

I had the good fortune to be included in a list of people to be presented to President Castillo Armas the Monday following my arrival—and was looking forward to it. Unfortunately, the president was assassinated the Sunday night before our Monday appointment; and I never saw him in life. One of my first duties was to be part of the American retinue that attended the funeral.

There immediately began a series of “new” governments, actually four of them. It took a year for these four governments to appear and disappear. The last one was formed by Presidente Ydigoras Fuentes.

Q: You'd better spell that.

NEEDHAM: That's Ydigoras Fuentes. Ydigoras Fuentes proved to be a very practical, rather pragmatic president, who matched his pragmatism with vigor. He maintained a steady schedule, itinerary of trips to various parts of this small republic. His activity in the commercial area was vigorous. An engineer, his vision as an economist was not exactly tutored, but was entrepreneurial; and he had the instinct for creating new highways, new

ports, and for improving the basic infrastructure of the country, which had been somewhat neglected by his predecessors.

Q: What was it that caused the intervening governments, before Fuentes, to disappear? Were they just inadequate? Was there internal opposition from just political sources or what?

NEEDHAM: It was primarily rivalry. The conservative element in Guatemalan politics had only just recovered from the Communist r#gime of Guzm#n Arbenz. They had only just recovered, really, from the liberality of his r#gime and did not, yet, feel secure. Meanwhile, the liberal elements in Guatemala were very anxious to regain what they considered to be their lost territory. So it was sheer hangover rivalry that caused this bucking back and forth —tug-of-war type of fall and rise, revolutionary movements, during one year of time.

Q: During this time, when you were having all this trouble as to who was going to be the ruler of the country, did this seriously effect USIS efforts and your attempt to make contacts and go ahead with your programs? Or didn't you feel much problem?

NEEDHAM: Well, we were acutely aware of the fact that there was no telling which side was going to emerge on top. Both Soviet Russia and Cuba were taking substantial interest in Guatemalan unrest. At the same time, we knew that our bona fides, while still unquestioned in the country, could become a matter of question, (from “election” to “election”!), if we put a foot wrong. We drew back a bit, in that the materials which we presented for coverage tended not to intervene in Guatemalan affairs, or even in Latin American affairs, if that seemed to be a sensitive area in relation to what was going on in Guatemala.

I guess what I am saying is, that we became cautious and waited. The game seemed to be to pursue non adjuratory objectives in every case. The goal was to weather the crisis, constructively. This gave us a chance to get into Americana materials again, as in the early days that I experienced in India. And we found that, here, too, there was a

welcome for information on how the family, the American family, really lived at home and what it really thought. Granted, it wasn't quite the juicy, even so-called sexy, flavor that a more politically-oriented output might have had for our very politically-minded audience, but it survived and it sufficed. We got through this period; and we had a very capable ambassador in place at the time, who lost no time in establishing a working relationship with President Ydigoras Fuentes.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

The Case of the Rash Reporter from Time Magazine

NEEDHAM: At the beginning of the turmoil, Ambassador Edward Sparks was on scene. An anecdote about Eddie is rather interesting at this time. As you can imagine, a lot of American media were interested in what was going on in Guatemala, not least of all, Time magazine. We had some difficulty with the roving Time magazine correspondent who came down to cover things during this period, and we finally wound up asking the young man to get a briefing from the ambassador, having cleared this idea with the ambassador first; the ambassador then being Edward Sparks.

The young man, defending his employer's position in a previous article, which had warmly eulogized a young rebel who had been accused of assassinating a government official —this young man said that, like the State Department, Time magazine had its own foreign policy. Ambassador Sparks replied to him, at the time, “That may well be, but Time magazine is not a republic, is not in Latin America, is not in this country, and has no Foreign Service representative in this country that I know of.” And that finished that interview.

Q: How did the young man react? Did it improve his reportage or did he keep right on blasting away at the Time policy?

NEEDHAM: He concluded that he had done his job. He'd been there for about a week at the time that this came to a head, and left the following day.

Q: I see.

NEEDHAM: Eddie Sparks was our ambassador well into 1958, and then was replaced by Ambassador Mallory. Ambassador Mallory was in place when Ydigoras Fuentes succeeded to the presidency of the republic. He lost no time in making a friend of Ydigoras Fuentes and gaining his confidence. And indeed, our AID program picked up considerably under Ydigoras Fuentes. In all, the Mallory-Ydigoras Fuentes period was a building period. Much was accomplished in terms of the infrastructure of the country.

And as far as USIA's effort was concerned, we forged ahead, both with the media and with our cultural affairs program, particularly the latter. Leader grants and scholar exchanges were multiplied during that period. I can't give the exact figures, but I know that they were at least doubled from the previous year. This was done rather easily because the post still retained the appropriations, which had not been used during the turmoil.

Q: Was there an AID program in Guatemala, at that time, that helped in the re-building of the infrastructure?

NEEDHAM: Yes, there was.

Q: Was USIS concerned with promoting it? Or did they have their own Public Affairs representative?

NEEDHAM: The AID program in Guatemala, at that time, was not staffed to operate its own information program. That function was performed by USIS.

The AID Assisted and Promoted Housing Program Involving Native Construction Involvement —Publicity Courtesy of USIS

USIS was not particularly concerned in promoting the country-wide infrastructure, such as ports and highways. But we were very interested in a particular project which AID was putting on. At the time it was original; it was founded by a man called Temple Dick, who had been, before coming into the government service, a San Francisco-based architect. And Dick, with a few of his associates, worked out a program which went about as follows:

They would go into the slums, in the barancas, and ask to meet the “leaders.” The “leaders” didn't have to be official. Generally, the people would point to one—and would agree on one or two individuals, and these individuals would be invited to the AID offices. There they would be acquainted with plans for a small complex of homes that might be built, provided that they and their neighbors could supply the labor, and the AID program would supply the materials; and that they would work in groups, building groups of homes.

These would be small, modest homes—concrete poured, slab floors—but they would have plumbing and electricity, which the people were not having in the barancas. They would be in a healthy part of town and there would be a change of lifestyle, and a new opportunity for these families and their children.

The men would work in groups of 12, each group building 12 homes. No homes would be distributed until all had been completed, and then they would be distributed by draw. The challenge was put before the “leaders,” that they go back to the baranca and interest people who they thought had the stamina and the purpose and the general acumen to see this opportunity and to take hold of it. They were warned against failure or against change of heart; if there was much of that, the whole project could collapse, they were told.

They did this. They went back to their barancas, and while I was there, there were 36 such homes built and they were built to completion. And the drawings were conducted with President Ydigoras Fuentes making the draw from the sombrero himself. The families moved into debt-free homes. I cannot quite describe the joy that was exhibited at these

ceremonies. And it wasn't just those who received the homes who were celebrating, but their friends and compatriots, as well.

This was something that appealed to everybody in the country. Temple Dick went on to do something like this in Chile, by constructing high schools in the same manner; arousing community effort and supplying materials while the community supplied the labor.

Q: Well, did you do any of the publicity work on this project?

NEEDHAM: Yes, we backed this, not only with press coverage and photos and stills and exhibits and seminars on housing and public health, but we also actually made several short motion picture documentaries right there on the scene.

Q: Which were then, subsequently, shown in other Spanish-speaking countries and, also, all over Guatemala, I suppose?

NEEDHAM: Yes. Right.

Q: Did you have a field motion picture program there?

Guatemalan Government Land Distribution Project Assisted by AID and Publicized by USIS - Especially Through Motion Picture Program

NEEDHAM: Yes, we did. It was rather extensive. There was a land reclamation project on the western plain, bordering the Pacific, in which Guatemalan farmers—or tenant farmers, I should say, really—were urged to participate in a lottery drawing.Participants would receive a quarter-section of land. And at the beginning, where the four quarters joined, there would be the communal things that they had to have to live: the general store, the well, the clinic, and the school.

After that, the government would clear about half of each quarter-section, leaving the other half to be cleared by the new tenant. I shouldn't say “tenant,” because, in fact, they had

become title-holding farmers. And this worked out very well. It started up at about the same time we were working out of the barancas, with urban people. By the time I left in '60, they were shipping their first crop of export—corn. USIS made several motion picture “shorts” on different aspects of land reclamation and farm operations, on location. These were shown throughout several Latin American countries.

Q: Now, was this agricultural development program something that was entirely financed by the Guatemalan Government, or was it partially an AID project?

NEEDHAM: This was partially AID. The Guatemalan Government felt, that by giving the land, they were doing their share; and we didn't argue about that.

Q: And I suppose this got, then, very extensive publicity, also?

NEEDHAM: Yes. This had more motion pictures on scene, at various stages of the building and of the harvesting and of the sowing, the clearing; even a few of them had weddings involved in the half-hour documentaries.

Q: In one sense you were publicizing what the government was doing for the people, and in the other, you were also supporting the AID program.

NEEDHAM: Yes. All in all, it was a productive period for American policy—American public policy in Guatemala.

One of the, what I call affectionate, memories connected with Guatemala concerns a young lad about 16 or 17 years of age, who had been working as a second assistant gardener to the public affairs officer when the public affairs officer had to leave the country for an extended period of time and was taking his wife and sister-in-law with him; so that, he had no use for a full gardening staff while he was away, and he wondered if I would take this little lad as my gardener, and I said I would. He warned me that the lad could not

speak, but was very faithful and very clean living and a good person to have around the premises.

So, on that basis, we accepted him. And he came in and it was quite true. Whatever you told him to do, he would do and do well; the first time or the twentieth time. But there was one handicap. He did not speak. He was mute, as he had been described to me by the public affairs officer, and he would not look directly at you because his two front teeth were missing and he was very shy about it.

This was the way we received him and this is the way we accepted him at first, until one day he did not come back from his Sunday day off; one Monday he was not there. And the following day, Tuesday, he still was not there. I became worried and went back to the small room that he had at the rear of our compound. And looking among his effects, I found a carton full of correspondence lessons in radio construction.

Q: In English?

NEEDHAM: In English and Spanish. I realized then that somehow or other this lad was literate. I wondered about him being mute and being able to learn English. I explored through the boxes, looking to see if there were Spanish courses, and it is my recollection that there were; there were both English and Spanish courses in the box. About this time, I began to worry about what had happened to him and I took steps to trace him back to his mother's house. We understood that his mother had remarried and his stepfather did not care very much to have him on the premises.

Well, as it turned out, that is exactly what had happened. He had gone home to see his mother, had an unpleasant session with his stepfather, and after the whipping had hesitated to return to our house until his face healed up. When he did return, I had a talk with him. He admitted that he primarily didn't want to show his teeth, which was why he didn't speak. And I said, “Well, we can do something about that.”

So we took him to a doctor, who referred him to a dentist, who put in peg false teeth in front, and he turned out to be quite a good-looking lad. We thought we'd go one step further, and we called the AID director and asked if he had any openings in his trade school, and he did. He had several in sheet metal work; several slots that were not being occupied.

So they entered Juanito in sheet metal class and he caught hold. He continued to work for us during the rest of our time in Guatemala and went to trade school four nights a week. He also wrote to us after we left Guatemala, for about three years. With the last letter I was very pleased; he recounted what his home was like. He had his own apartment—only a one-room apartment—but he was happy. He was solvent. And he ended his letter by saying, “I think I am going to marry.” That was the last I ever heard from him.

Q: That's the last you heard from him?

NEEDHAM: Yes.

1960: From Guatemala to Paraguay as Country PAO

Q: And when, then, did you leave Guatemala? And where did you go from there?

NEEDHAM: Well, I left Guatemala for Paraguay. I was promoted to public affairs officer and direct-transferred to Paraguay in June of '60. And that began another story.

Q: Okay, from Guatemala, then, you went to Paraguay. So why don't you go ahead with your aims and interests and activities in Paraguay?

NEEDHAM: Paraguay was a different program entirely. I replaced PAO Byron Winstead in 1960, in July or June. And I found a much smaller program than the program I had been working with in Guatemala, and one of totally different character.

Q: You were there as PAO in 1960?

Constraints on a USIS Program Operating in a Country Tightly Controlled by a Restrictive Dictator

NEEDHAM: Yes. And this difference in program character was essentially attributable to one man's personality, that of the last and longest-term dictator in Latin America, Alfredo Stroessner, who had succeeded to power through a coup several years earlier, and, even now, is only recently out of office.

The ambassador and his counselors were required to work very closely with the president. Embassy relationships were almost on a one-to-one basis with President Stroessner and members of his Cabinet. The USIS operation was less involved in these substantive matters than we had been in Guatemala or in other posts in which I had served.

After the initial getting acquainted period, which lasted a month or two, I found that the post was, generally, well equipped, but seemed to lack program direction, particularly among the operating sections. And I began to go through the sections and determine such things as key audiences for motion picture activities, key audiences, or needful places that would welcome exhibits, and to cultivate the few newspapers that existed in the country; and to strengthen the press section, establishing a closer liaison with the working Paraguayan press.

A major asset to the post, already a long time in place, was the binational center in the heart of Asunci#n, the capital. Here, we had a long-standing program of languages, exhibits, lectures, social events, dances, concerts, seminars, and it was a rather well-used facility and the only one of its kind in the capital. It was popular with the families and the students of the opposite political persuasion; that is, opposite to the president's persuasion.

Q: That was the Colorado Party?

NEEDHAM: That was the Colorado Party, and the opposition was known as the Liberal Party. At times, I often wondered if our binational center hadn't become a Liberal redoubt, because over the years the open academic atmosphere had proved very invitational to people who thought of themselves as being a suppressed opposition.

It was difficult, at times, to ignore this fact. When it reached a point where I thought it might be embarrassing to the embassy, in its relationship with the president, I would cultivate the Colorado side of the community in an attempt to stimulate events which were of less political persuasion. It was a continuing thing to watch. Fortunately, it never became serious.

We did find, at the beginning of the second year, a need out in the countryside. In the second largest city in Paraguay, Villarica, we found a certain intellectual life and community, evincing an interest in establishing a binational center if we could provide some help. They had a building and land already held aside. The building, a former mansion, needed refurbishing. It was a large building. It had a ballroom which would become an auditorium. It had an extensive service kitchen. It had several large rooms, which would make library sections—very pleasant. And it had good grounds, which could serve for outdoor social occasions. It was located in a good neighborhood and we saw very little objection to raise against it. We promised to take it under advisement.

I did this, and discussed it with Ambassador Harry Stimpson at the time, who thought that it was a worthy idea. We were preparing a request to the agency for supplemental funds to make a grant, when a committee from Villarica appeared in my office one day and announced that they had already launched a fund raising committee in Villarica. So this all worked quite rapidly, and about eight months later we had a full day of dedication ceremonies which the ambassador attended. This is probably the only binational center that was ever built entirely with local funds.

That about describes the program that we instituted. We did pay a little more attention to the boondocks audience than I have indicated so far, particularly in the third year. There are a number of communities along the Paraguay River, which borders the west and the south of Paraguay, an inland country. We operated a small launch, with a motion picture crew, up and down that river, two or three times during the year; equipping the launch with motion pictures, pamphlets and exhibits materials, and establishing contact with many of the villages along the shore of the river.

We also did a similar-type program inland, using an ox cart to reach certain places which were not connected by any road. But this, perforce, was given less emphasis in our program work than the capital itself, where 75% of the people in Paraguay reside and work.

Q: Are these field operations largely motion picture in character?

NEEDHAM: Yes, yes. Illiteracy still exists in remote parts of rural Paraguay.

Q: I suppose some distribution of pamphlets?

NEEDHAM: That's right. While we were doing this, establishing an American presence of educational and friendly interest in the country and its people, the ambassador and his counselors were pursuing a very sensitive, substantive program with a “difficult” president. I think that Ambassador Snow was most influential with President Stroessner in rescuing the guaran# from really serious threatened inflation during the year 1962.

Q: The guaran# being the monetary unit of Paraguay.

NEEDHAM: That's right. I can't remember just exactly what the exchange rate to the dollar was, at that particular time, but it was extraordinarily high; I do remember that. Ambassador Snow convinced President Stroessner that an approach to cure this

threatening situation would be to have an IMF, International Monetary Fund, team of experts come in and do the survey and make recommendations.

To our surprise, President Stroessner agreed. He, perhaps, had no other choice. I think the ambassador played this ploy very well, because in the space of several months the president proceeded to accept almost all the recommendations of the IMF team. He curtailed certain outgoes in the national budget and instituted some reforms in taxing; and, in general, took domestic measures to curb inflation in the country.

Eventually, he was at the point, in terms of the guarani's value, where he could have dismissed the IMF monitoring operation, which was continuously going on. And for a while, Ambassador Snow was concerned that the president might do that. He finally broached the situation to the president, and to his great relief, President Stroessner said, “I wouldn't be without them.” And so, they continued in place and were still in place when I left in late 1962.

Late 1962: Reassignment to Washington as Latin American Guidance Officer in Office of Policy and Plans (IOP)

Q: And to what assignment did you go from Paraguay?

NEEDHAM: I was reassigned to Washington for duty as Latin American Guidance Officer in the Office of Policy and Plans.

Q: As Guidance Officer, what, precisely, were your duties and responsibilities?

NEEDHAM: As one can imagine, an agency that is operating an international press service, the Voice of America, an International Radio Broadcasting Service, in many languages, to many countries, on affairs which are of interest to these countries, has a certain responsibility to support and not embarrass official policy of a substantive nature. And that puts forth the reason for, what I call, guidance. It was a matter of recommending

to the operating elements of the Agency treatment of issues and matters, which the Agency was passing along through its media services to all of the foreign posts overseas. In my case, of course, just the Latin American posts.

The routine consisted of getting into the office rather early in the morning and reading the New York Times, the Washington Post, the three wire services, and, also, the foreign broadcast intelligence service. In addition to that, there might be as many as 50 to 150 telegrams, that had come in overnight, in your “IN” box. And these were scanned for pertinent matters requiring treatment, consultation, and/or guidance.

From that session one walked over to the State Department and conferred with his opposite number desk officers to see if there were matters of substantive nature involved, which required special treatment. From these consultations was composed a guidance each day, which was put forth at what we called the “noon conference.” The noon conference was an assembly of representatives, also policy-guiding officers, from each of the media elements of the agency and the area guidance officers, such as myself, for each of the five areas.

And that meeting was extraordinarily efficient. We were able to get through it, in almost every case, in less than half an hour. The guidance that each area officer laid down presumably would hold for at least 24 hours. When superseded by events, the necessary amendments were the responsibility of the area Guidance Officer.

In addition to doing this fast guidance work, each of us was responsible for long-term guidance in the form of special typed memorandums, known as news-policy notes. I recall many an hour of sweat and toil over these papers. They took several weeks in the composition, a lot of research, a lot of conference with the State Department and other related agencies having an interest in the matter or in the country, and finally, lots of concurrences before they became true, long-term policy guidance papers.

Another facet of the duties of guidance officers at the policy and plans level was to maintain very close liaison with the area offices of the agency; that is, the assistant directors and their staffs for each area, and in my case, the Latin American area. I can remember Assistant Director for Latin America, Kermit Brown, so very well, before his untimely death, and what a joy it was to confer with Kermit and his staff. That was to coordinate not only what was going on in the field with policy, but often to coordinate policy with what was going on in the field.

1965: A Stint in Vietnam: Some Observations on JUSPAO Effectiveness in That Country

I continued in this capacity until late 1965, when it came my turn to do a tour in Vietnam. I was in Vietnam, with JUSPAO, under Barry Zorthian and Harry Casler, first as press attach# to the ambassador, who was Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge at that time, and then later on special duty developing materials for the South Vietnamese Government; materials of a feature nature.

Q: I know several of our people had some doubts as to how effective the JUSPAO program was, and I wonder whether or not you have any opinion as to whether we, in JUSPAO, had any substantial long-range or short-range effect in Vietnam?

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, we certainly had some effect just by being there. But that has to be largely on a short-range basis. We had representatives in the provinces and I have no doubt that, to a certain extent, at that time there was some advantage gained. But I don't think it was of a lasting nature. And I would say that holds true for the largest part of the JUSPAO program, except for the work that Douglas Pike did in research and study, which was very deep, very substantive, and which I understand is still of considerable current value and use.

Q: Yes, it certainly is. We have an interview with Doug Pike, in which he goes into his opinions and his work in Vietnam. He was there for 15 years. He's now, of course, with

the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California, at Berkeley, where he continues to be considered, practically, the country's expert on Vietnam.

1967: Return to IOP Latin America Policy Guidance Position. Disagreement Leads to Reassignment

NEEDHAM: I returned from Vietnam in '67 and, fortunately, and happily, my old slot in IOP was vacant and I was asked if I would like to have it again. I replied affirmatively, because I had enjoyed the first tour in IOP very much; found the work extremely interesting and felt effective whilst doing it. So from 1967 through most of 1968, I was back on the Latin American desk and enjoyed it until it came time to move on and I reported for duty elsewhere.

Q: I understand that you had a little trouble before you left the second time. Would you go into that a bit?

NEEDHAM: [Laughter] All right, Lew. I should have known I wasn't going to get off the hook that easily. Well, my tenure with IOP terminated, rather abruptly, in a personal disagreement over work, specifically over a news policy note which I had been preparing for several months, and through several drafts, and which John Pauker, the then-chief of the fast guidance section, was consistently refusing to pass on for our director's approval.

I ran out of patience. John ran out of patience. And we had a very strident set-to one evening after work hours in his office. It was so strident as to be final. And the next morning I went down to personnel and asked for relief from that assignment, and assignment to something else, leaving the choice up to personnel.

Six Months in Lagos, Nigeria at Time of So-called Biafran Rebellion

Personnel's choice was to send me out to Nigeria, to Lagos. This was during the attempted revolt, led by a gentleman named Ojukwu; generally know as the Biafra episode.

NEEDHAM: Personnel had proposed me to the director for approval as a deputy PAO on temporary duty at Lagos, under PAO Beverly Carter, with special responsibilities for guidance to the State Department and the Agency. The area director, who at that time was John Reinhardt (he later became Director of USIA), was gracious and supportive in this appointment, for which I was grateful at that time, and remain grateful to this day; because it turned out to be a most interesting and rewarding six months in Lagos.

My duties in Lagos were rather simply defined. I was to provide the State Department and the Agency with a pr#cis, one every 12 hours, on the state of public and official opinion in Nigeria, with regard to the Biafran conflict. These telegrams were for the ambassador's signature and, of course, required his approval. This was a rather strenuous, but routine, work consisting of interviews daily with the ministries and with the president's entourage; and a review of the local press, with some personal contact with publishers and editors.

The necessity for these telegrams arose from the need for the State Department, primarily, and also USIA—for guidance in handling the news—to be aware of the situation in Lagos, primarily to keep a firm foothold on the tug of war in public opinion going on in both countries.

There was sentiment in America for American intervention in the Biafran situation, and there was sentiment against it. This was also true in Lagos. There were segments of President Gowon's government that felt the United States should intervene on their side, and there were others who felt that the last thing in the world they wanted to see was American intervention in Nigerian affairs.

Q: That's very interesting, because I think you probably know that within the States there was a great tendency on the part of the media in the U.S. to side with the Biafran attempt to overthrow the central government. And I think if you could have measured the feeling in this country, at least along the eastern seaboard, they were primarily in favor of a Biafran victory, rather than in favor of the central government victory. You never had an opportunity to sample Biafran opinion, I gather?

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, practically no Americans got over to the Biafran side, as we call it. Incidentally, Biafra is a term that was floated by Ojukwu and his lieutenants, and came to America via press correspondents. In reality, there is no such place as Biafra. There is Eastern and Western Nigeria. The eastern part of Nigeria is that occupied by the Ibos, who are rated one of the superior tribes, historically, in that part of Africa.

Biafra is a bight of the Atlantic Ocean down at the extreme southwest coast of Nigeria, principally known through its main port, which is Port Harcourt. The only contact, that I'm aware of, that Americans may have had with the east of Nigeria during this period is, perhaps, through some of the convoys conveying medicines and foods to both sides of the conflict. Starvation had been one of the weapons against the Biafran rebels.

America had said that we would not intervene in this conflict, but that we would provide medicine and supplies to those needful on both sides of the issue. And that was done. It had a rather slow, but long-reaching, effect. It probably supported the final settlement of the conflict, which became amicable, and today Nigeria is one nation, not having been divided by this rebellion.

Return to U.S.: Short Tour as Deputy Director for Bureau of Public Affairs in African Area, State Department

NEEDHAM: Upon returning from Nigeria, I was queried by State Department personnel, to see if I would be interested in acting as Deputy Director for the Bureau of Public Affairs in the African area of the State Department.

Having freshly returned from Africa, I was, naturally, still very interested in that continent, and it seemed like a decent opportunity to round out almost 20 years of service with USIA. So I very happily took the assignment, which lasted for almost a year.

Then, I returned to USIA in order to replace Mike Giufreda, who had had a heart attack.Mike was chief of the Near East branch of IPS.

So I finished off my career, really, in my home section of the Agency, which was IPS. And I must say, in conclusion, that it was a very enjoyable 20 years and I don't regret a moment of it.

Q: Well, Howard, I think earlier you had told me you had a couple of temporary assignments, which I think, in our interest in getting over to some of the specific areas where you served, we didn't cover. And you might want to say a word, before we conclude the interview, about those couple of temporary assignments or special assignments.

NEEDHAM: Yes, I know the ones you mean, Lew. You're talking about a year in which I was an oral examiner for the State Department; going about the country—our own country—interviewing and listening to the minds of very bright young Americans who had already passed the stiff, written State Department examination for candidacy to be a Foreign Service officer.

The second stage, of course, with their vetting was the oral exam. And together with several of our colleagues, in a rotating order, I had the pleasure of talking to these young people, who aspired to be Foreign Service Officers, and of listening to the brightness of

their minds. We accepted very few compared to the many who were pressing at the doors. But that has always been the case in the Foreign Service examination procedures.

The only other interim assignment I can think of, that was of interest, was one trip to Afghanistan in 1970 as an inspector. The inspection was routine. USIA was staffed at Kabul with a competent group, headed up by Peter Brescia. We found some dissension between the embassy and the USIS operation, but that was rather quickly straightened out.

The thing I remember most vividly was, every visitation that we made to elements of the Afghan Government seemed to conclude with the Afghani officials urging the United States to enter the scene in Afghanistan and establish a much larger presence, because they felt they were about to be gobbled up by the Soviet Republic.

Q: Howard, I think we've covered most of your activities in the Agency. And unless you have something that you want to add, I think we might as well conclude the interview. To me, it's been a very interesting one, and I think it's well worthwhile. I'm very grateful to you for having given us the time to do this. I know it's been rather a long stint. So thanks a lot for your patience and your contribution to our project.

NEEDHAM: You're more than welcome, Lew.

End of interview